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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2841
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5903
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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2266
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5110
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1510
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0194
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0868
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0961
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0674
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1650
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 5174
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5313
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2013
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001314

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR REES DISCUSSES BURMA WITH RTG, NGOS

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) During a April 17-21 visit to Thailand, U.S. Special Representative for Social Issues Ambassador Rees discussed Burma with MFA North America Division Director General Nongnuth Petcharatana and in a separate meeting with International Organizations Deputy Director General Ittiporn Boonpracong and Social Division Director Nadhavathna Krishnamra. In both meetings Ambassador Rees described Burma's upcoming constitutional referendum (slated for May 10th) as a crucial event in the country's political development. He encouraged the MFA officials to press Burma's ruling junta to establish the basic conditions for a free and fair election, which would send strong signals to the international community that Burma was serious about resolving the current political crisis. Rees recognized Thailand's commitment to the policy of non-interference, but posited that when Burma violated universal human rights and obligations to the international community, then institutions such as the UN and ASEAN should hold Burma's rulers accountable. Nongnuth and Ittiporn asserted that Thailand supported human rights and democracy issues, but that each country's approach was different. Nongnuth alluded to what she called Thailand's 'quiet diplomacy' efforts over the past several months, while Ittiporn claimed that the RTG did not want to start the 45th war between Thailand and Burma.

12. (U) Rees also reminded Nongnuth and Ittiporn of the continuing credible reports of serious human rights violations by Burmese government forces against members of ethnic nationality groups, including the use of rape as an

instrument of conflict and oppression. Nongnuth and Ittiporn reiterated that Thailand is concerned about human rights violations in Burma but has a different approach to these problems than the United States.

13. (C) Member of Parliament and long-time Burma advocate Kraissak Choonhaven also touched on Burma during his April 21 meeting with Ambassador Rees. Appointed president of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) steering committee just days prior to his meeting with Rees, Kraissak expressed dismay at the RTG's handling of Burma. According to Kraissak, it was difficult to get Thai parliamentarians to focus on human rights in Burma when the Thai MPs and Senators were so preoccupied with various human rights and democracy matters in their own country. To date, Kraissak had recruited seven parliamentarians from the opposition Democrat Party to support AIPMC, but he continued to face difficulty in convincing members of the governing coalition to collaborate on Burma.

14. (C) Members of the Thai-Burmese Friendship Association (recently organized by Chalida Tajaroensuk's NGO, People's Empowerment) described the benefits and challenges of cross-border assistance to Burma. Dr. Cynthia Maung, Director of the Mae Tao Clinic, lamented to Ambassador Rees that groups inside and outside of Burma tend to work in isolation from each other. She recommended increased coordination and collaboration to increase the effectiveness of their work as well as to integrate areas of overlap. Htoo Chit, Director of the Foundation for Education and Development (Grassroots - HRE) believed it was important to reach out to the extensive Burmese migrant community living in Thailand. In Htoo Chit's estimation, up to 60% of the two million Burmese migrants in Thailand were open to the idea of political activism at some level. For example, he suggested

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that even basic, tailored information campaigns directed at these migrants would be beneficial in that the migrants would share the information with their friends and families still residing in Burma and with whom they are in regular contact.

15. (C) Rees also discussed the situation in Burma with other interlocutors, including Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma's (ALTSEAN) Coordinator Debbie Stothard, the National Council of the Union of Burma's (NCUB) General Secretary Maung Maung, and the Thailand Burma Border Consortium's Executive Director Jack Dunford. Maung Maung and Stothard indicated that the Burma democracy movement, both inside and outside, was now united behind the 'Vote No' campaign. (Note: Post will elaborate on the relationship between activists inside and outside Burma septel. End note.) Although a few democracy advocates had initially argued that any constitutional framework might be better than the status quo, they had changed their minds when the draft constitution was finally made public. Dunford suggested that notwithstanding the extreme difficulties of political organizing in Burma, the people remain very angry about the September crackdown, and particularly about the killing of monks, and could well vote overwhelming against the constitution. He acknowledged, however, that it is far from certain that the government would announce such a result.

COMMENT

16. (C) We continue to engage the Thais on the issue of Burma and Ambassador Rees' visit provided yet another opportunity to do so. It is apparent that Burma is being discussed at many different levels within the RTG. We are encouraged by the development of grassroots efforts such as the Thai-Burmese Friendship Association, which fights an uphill battle to promote greater understanding about Burma among the Thais. End Comment.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Rees cleared this cable.
JOHN